

**Exeter Fire District  
Budget Hearing  
(February 23, 2006)**

**Call to Order**

**Chairman Peter Lacouture called the budget hearing for the Exeter Fire District to order at 7:00pm. Present were Commissioners Vergano, Lacouture, Wilbur, Nievera, Walker, Swanson and Reed. There were 24 members of the public in attendance.**

**Public Comment**

**Mr. Lacouture explained the budget process and the format of the budget in general to those in attendance. Each department head was asked to give a brief presentation of their individual budget as well as any explanations that they felt might be necessary.**

**Ms. Vergano explained the admin budget and how she arrived at the final figures. She noted the increase in the “legal” line may be needed to defend our position during the attempt to organize currently underway by the Rescue Corps employees. She also noted the underestimation of postage due to the unusually high rate of delinquencies, as well as an increase in general postage rates.**

**Chief Curry presented the budget for Station#1, as did Chief Franklin for Station #2. Mr. Colacone gave a short explanation of the Dispatch Corp. budget and Chief Caito presented the budget request**

for the Rescue Corps. Chief Caito cited the majority of his budget increase was due to higher fuel costs, his plan to cover additional hours and build an addition to the Rescue building, needed for office space for the administration and bunk space for overnight rescue personnel.

Joe Smith (Yawgoo Valley Rd.) asked the intent of the board should the ISO line item be defeated. Mr. Lacouture explained how the \$6,000 figure was determined and that it would be necessary to move forward with the ISO project. Mr. Smith would rather the money remain in the budget to advance the ISO objective. Mr. Smith asked whether Chief St. Jean would be able to act as an ISO consultant, saving the district a large portion of the line item. Chief Franklin advised Mr. Smith that the inspections Chief St. Jean administers for the departments differ greatly from ISO audits. "Chief St. Jean is just not qualified to act as an ISO consultant" offered Chief Franklin. Chief Franklin explained the advantages of a consultant and is of the opinion that we would be better off with Mr. Dowdy (ISOSlayer.com) in the long run. He also discussed the need for three years of records to be compiled on various equipment testing and that a consultant could not change the amount of time needed for the testing history.

Tom McMillan (Cobblestone Hill Rd.) offered that the public is not aware of the ISO process and that it is a 3-year initiative. Ms. Vergano asked when the 3 years started. She offered that we have been talking

about this for a year now and have accomplished nothing and that the three year window seems unclear.

Rosamond Fisher (Ten Rod Rd.) inquired as to the collection rate of the district. Ms. Vergano stated that we had collected about 79% of the billed amount. Ms. Fisher stated that she thought that was terrible. Mr. Nievera explained how collections were advancing and that 9 month into the year, a 79% collection rate is not a bad thing. He noted that there was still one full collection quarter remaining. “A 79% collection rate at the end of the year is certainly nothing to be proud of, but 79% after three quarters is pretty good.” Mr. Nievera then explained the current delinquency rate and the number of accounts delinquent after the first, second and third quarters. He noted that the number of delinquent accounts seems to be decreasing.

Dan Patterson (South County Tr.) noted that the FEMA grant was not listed on any of the department budget sheets. Hal Morgan (Dispatch president) replied that the money had already been spent on radios and communications equipment. Mr. Patterson stated that his understanding for forming the district was to organize all the public safety organizations under one authority which would result in savings to the taxpayers. Mr. Nievera stated that was not the initial intent, however that may be the case as the district evolves. Chief Franklin added that since the fire companies were volunteers and have no paid staff, there is little opportunity to save money.

**Jack Kliever (Purgatory Rd.) gave a short historical perspective on the organizations noting that they are all separate non-profits and that it would be very difficult to meld them into one organization. He hopes that, in time, one organization would be possible.**

**Paul McAdam (Partridge Dr.) recommended leaving the ISO project to the fire chiefs; “You have a good department.”**

**Joe Smith asked what the ISO start date would be for all the departments, noting that we do not seem to be getting much accomplished at the present time. Chief Franklin (Station #2) stated that operations must take precedence. He further explained the cost of testing ladders and other operational equipment. Mr. Smith again asked the chiefs when, specifically, the three year time period began. Chief Franklin responded that it began when the fire district started. Chief Curry agreed.**

**Mr. Smith stated that the budgets seem to be arbitrary. The 990's filed for each department indicate that the Rescue Corps and Dispatch Center are running very lean and the fire companies are socking money away at a hefty rate. “The income vs. expenses is way out of line for both fire departments.” He feels that there should be a “sharing of the wealth.” Chief Franklin noted that money is put aside for specific expenses, some long term and some short. The 990 will not indicate money set aside for projected expenses. Chief Caito**

noted that the reason the Rescue Corps is in the shape it's in with regard to the absence of a truck fund is reason enough to leave the fire companies alone and let them continue with their long range planning. "We requested money for a truck fund over the past two budget cycles and it was cut from our budget. An unidentified member in attendance commented "Pay me now or pay me later." Mr. McAdam thought it was a good idea to set money aside for large purchases, however the departments should be more forthcoming with the totals. He also feels that grants should be shown in the budgets. Mr. Lacouture explained that the money is not being hidden; The 990's are open and available to anyone who is interested in obtaining them. He added that Station #2 has two line items in their budget that list these long-term objectives. Mr. Swanson wants the truck funds under the control of the board rather than the individual departments. Mr. Patterson would like to see more up to date financial information prior to voting at the annual meeting. Chief Caito offered that the different fiscal years used by each department would make any attempt at standardization difficult. Mr. Kliever suggested that all of the organizations submit updated debt and liquid asset information with their budget proposals on a yearly basis.

Mr. Nievera moved (Ms. Vergano second) closing the budget hearing at 8:10pm. The motion carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Bill Nievera, Clerk**  
**Exeter Fire District**